

DNREC Fish & Wildlife Enforcement Blotter: March 20-27; Reminder for the week: Life jackets, cold water precautions recommended for spring boating safety

DOVER (March 28, 2013) – To achieve public compliance through education and enforcement actions that help conserve Delaware's fish and wildlife resources and ensure safe boating and public safety, DNREC Division of Fish & Wildlife Enforcement agents made 597 contacts with hunters, anglers, boaters and the general public, including 12 boating safety checks, in which all but one vessel operator was found to be in compliance. Agents also responded to 15 complaints and issued 5 citations between March 20 and 27.

Citations issued by violation type included the following, with the number of charges in parentheses:

Wildlife Conservation: Operating a motor vehicle at excessive speed in a state wildlife area (1), operating a motor vehicle off an established roadway in a state wildlife area (1), and dumping in a state wildlife area (1), New Castle County; Trespassing after hours in a state wildlife area (1), Kent County.

Boating Safety: Insufficient number of life jackets aboard vessel (1), Kent County.

Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Training

Fish and Wildlife agents Sr. Cpl. Casey Zolper and K-9 Warden attended a week of quarterly training in Maryland March 18-22,

joining Maryland Department of Natural Resources dogs and handlers to practice their tracking, evidence recovery and wildlife detection skills. Sr. Cpl. Zolper trained K-9 Warden to alert on the scent of river herring to help in locating illegally caught herring. As of this spring, Zolper and Warden have been partners for seven years. Since Warden joined the Enforcement Section in 2006, he and Zolper have tracked missing people and evasive suspects, located key evidence in wildlife conservation and criminal cases, and represented the Delaware Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Section in public demonstrations of Warden's specialized skills.

Are you AWARE?

With signs of spring in the air, the DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Section and the Delaware Office of Boating Safety would like to remind early season boaters and anglers of the importance of life jackets. "Statistics show that not wearing life jackets is one of the leading causes of boating fatalities in the state of Delaware as well as nationwide, and that 80 percent of these fatalities could have been prevented by life jacket use," said Sgt. Gregory Rhodes, Delaware Boating Safety Office. "Like seatbelts in automobiles, we know without question that life jackets save lives."

In Delaware, life jackets also are the law – and the law requires that owners/operators of recreational vessels carry one readily accessible life jacket for each person aboard, and that children age 12 and younger wear a life jacket while underway in any vessel on Delaware waters. (Minimum fine for violations: \$76.50)

"Vessel operators are responsible to make sure that children aboard their boat are wearing life jackets – and they can set the example by also wearing one," Sgt. Rhodes said. "Although the law does not require ages 13 and older to wear a life jacket, we strongly recommend life jacket use by everyone aboard a vessel in Delaware waters, especially anyone with

limited swimming skills. It's a smart choice that can prevent an unnecessary tragedy."

Even on days when the air is warm, boaters also should remember that water temperatures are still cold – currently 43 to 45 degrees, Sgt. Rhodes said, noting that immersion in cooler water can lead to hypothermia very quickly, in which the body instinctively protects its core by shutting down blood flow to limbs first. The Coast Guard recommends wearing layers for protection and warmth, including gloves and a hat. Recommended gear also includes a floatation coat or survival suit, which also acts a life jacket, or a dry suit, which keeps water out and, with thermal layers beneath, keeps warmth in.

Sgt. Rhodes added these tips:

- If you fall overboard or capsize, stay with your boat for a better chance of being found sooner.
- Keep clothing on to help retain heat.
- Keep your cell phone in a secure pocket and sealed in a plastic bag.
- Carry a personal position locator beacon, a personal emergency locator light and/or flares, and a whistle to make noise and attract the attention of rescuers.
- Pack a set of dry clothing in a sealed plastic bag.
- File a "float plan" with a responsible friend or family member. Include a description of your boat, when you plan to head out, who is going with you, where you plan to go and when you plan to return.

"Filing a float plan is always a good idea, because unforeseen circumstances can hit boaters in any season at any time, including a storm, engine problems, swamping, and injuries or other health issues," Sgt. Rhodes said. "With your plans in hand, a friend or family member can call for help if you're overdue and tell searchers where to begin looking for you, saving precious time."

For more information on safe boating practices in Delaware, including an easy-to-use float plan form, please visit www.fw.delaware.gov/Boating/BoatingSafety.htm.

The DNREC Division of Fish and Wildlife recognizes and thanks the majority of anglers, hunters and boaters who comply with and support Delaware's fishing, hunting and boating laws and regulations. Citizens are encouraged to report fish and wildlife and boating violations to the Delaware Fish and Wildlife Enforcement Section by calling 302-739-4580. Wildlife violations may also be reported anonymously to Operation Game Theft by calling 800-292-3030 or online at www.dnrec.delaware.gov/fw/Hunting/Pages/OpGameTheft.aspx .

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